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ABSTRACT

The problem of how prospective secondary school teachers of speech should develop a facility for orally critiquing speeches in the classroom is presented. A current program in which all undergraduate speech education majors must complete a course called Teaching Speech in High School is examined. Methods of fulfilling the course requirements, including listening to speeches, criticizing them, and teaching at least one class period under the supervision of the regular instructor, are examined. Values of this program are analyzed. (CK)

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ORAL CRITICISM OF SPEAKING PERFORMANCE: A PRE-STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION MAJORS.

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A problem long observed in working with prospective secondary teachers of speech has been an apprehension of orally critiquing speeches in the classroom. In the methods course at Eastern Illinois University such questions arise as, Should we critique orally? If so, what should we say? A recent revision of the methods course requirement attempts to provide applicable experience in speech criticism.

Karl F. Robinson, writing in 1954, stated that, "criticism is a process of revealing diagnosis or evaluation of performance to the student so that he may take steps to improve his work." Others writing in the area of speech criticism have generally agreed with Robinson's stress on improvement as the end of oral and/or written criticism. (Balcer and Seabury, 1965; Seiger, 1956; Montgomery, 1957; Smith, 1961; Kelly, 1965) The emphasis placed on the importance of teacher criticism, be it oral or written, at the secondary level has created a need for a laboratory type experience in criticism for undergraduate speech education majors prior to the teaching practicum. Paul D. Holtzman underscored the need when he stated that, "the critic of a speech has one primary question to answer: 'What can I say (or write or do) that will result in this student's improving his communicative ability?' Note that this is a very different question from, 'What did he do poorly?' or 'What did he do well?'"

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Thus, past research in the area of speech education has generally stressed meaningful oral and/or written criticism of performance as a vital component of the learning process in the speech classroom. Likewise, past experience in training secondary teachers of speech has resulted in a noticed apprehension of making meaningful critical remarks to students in speech classes.

One method in the speech education classroom of criticism practice consists of running video tapes of high school speakers for class oral and written comment. Video tape is not innovative and is restricted to colleges and universities possessing the needed equipment.

At Eastern Illinois University an additional method has been implemented to provide prospective high school classroom teachers life experiences in criticizing speeches. The additional method does not replace the use of video tape or any other method; it supplements other methods and adds the actual experience dimension. It provides the student living experience in criticism before student teaching.

Explanation of Program

Every undergraduate speech education major must complete a course in Teaching Speech in High School. A part of the course requirement states that the student complete from 8-10 hours in a section of the basic speech course in the department of speech at Eastern Illinois University. The range of 8-10 hours serves the convenience of the regular instructor of the basic course. The student must fulfill 8 hours to meet the course requirement; however, the basic course instructor may require the student to complete one or two additional hours. A few students, after completing

the minimum 8 hours, vanish from the sight of the instructor even though he was in the midst of criticizing a round of speeches or teaching a unit. Of course the student may spend more than 10 hours in the class if he desires and the instructor consents. Thus far in the program, about half the students have elected to spend more than required hours in the class. It is expected that the student will spend some time in conference with the instructor. Such conference time is not included in the 8-10 hour requirement.

No effort is made to establish a rigid pattern of activity for the student. The decision as to what the student actually does in the classroom rests ultimately with the regular instructor of the basic course. Three categories of activity are suggested: Observation: The student may observe the teaching of the instructor and/or activities of the class. Criticism: The student may do written and/or oral critiques of speeches, discussions, or any other class performance activities. This second category normally receives most stress. Teaching: In most cases the student ultimately teaches at least one class period under the supervision of the regular instructor. In some situations the student may teach a complete unit.

At the end of the quarter the methods instructor receives an evaluation of the student's performance from the participating instructor. Specific questions considered are: Did the student fulfill the minimum of 8 hours in the classroom? What strengths did you note in the student that might ultimately contribute to successful teaching? What weaknesses did you note that might ultimately create difficulty in a teaching situation? The student is not graded.

Also at the end of the quarter each participating student submits a diary of the teaching experience. The diary consists of a day by day account of what he did in the class and his reactions to the teaching situation.

The student need only account for 8-10 days in the diary even if he spent more time in class.

Values and Limitations

While the primary value sought in the program is to provide the prospective teacher of speech supervised experience in speech criticism, there are other values of the program. It allows the student to truly observe the teaching of a basic course. Up to the time of enrollment in methods courses most observations of teaching have involved the student's observing his own instructor in given classes. Needless to say the student's vested interest in that type situation could easily influence his impression of what took place. Second, if the basic course instructor feels the student is competent and ready, the prospective teacher may get his first "taste" of actual teaching apart from micro-teaching in the methods classroom. The program also provides the methods student contact with a classroom teacher to discuss problems of teaching. Prior to this point most contacts with instructors have been for the purpose of discussing the student's own progress in a given course.

While the described pro ram offers the prospective teacher of speech an opportunity to evaluate speeches in the classroom under supervision, one major limitation must be recognized. Inherent in rationalizing the program is a willingness to accept a relationship between criticizing speeches in a high school classroom and in the classroom of a basic college speech course. The author is willing to accept the two teaching situations as sufficiently similar to warrant implementation of the program.

The workability of such a program is dependent on two factors--either of which could cause an unsurmountable problem in any given situation. First, it is necessary that enough sections of a beginning speech course be offered to accommodate the number of students enrolled in the methods course. Second, cooperation from most of the teaching staff of the basic course is essential.

The response from both students and staff participating in the initial phase of the program during the 1969-1970 academic year has convinced the Department of Speech at Eastern Illinois University that such laboratory type experiences offer a meaningful challenge to the methods student that he cannot get in the speech methods classroom.

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